

Message Text

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ACTION CU-05

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TO USIA WASHDC
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 1 OF 2 KATHMANDU 1186

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E.O. 11652: N/A
SUBJECT: BILATERAL COMMUNICATIONS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEPAL
AND U.S.

REF: USIA 4347 CIRCULAR

1. TWO FACTORS ARE CENTRAL TO ANY DEFINITION OF THE COMMUNICATIONS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE U.S. AND NEPAL: (1) U.S. INTERESTS, LONG-TERM AND SHORT-TERM, ARE NOW AND ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN LIMITED. (2) IN WHAT IS, AT LEAST FUNCTIONALLY, AN ABSOLUTE MONARCHY, A RATHER RESTRICTED NUMBER OF PEOPLE MAKE OR INFLUENCE DECISIONS IN AREAS OF MUTUAL INTEREST. IT IS THIS SMALL GROUP (CONSISTING OF THE KING, CERTAIN MEMBERS OF THE PALACE SECRETARIAT, AND A FEW EXPERTS TRUSTED IN THEIR FIELDS OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE) WHICH IS LEAST ACCESSIBLE TO DIRECT PROGRAMMING. HOWEVER, MOST MIDDLE-RANKING AND MANY HIGH-RANKING NEPALIS ARE MORE READILY ACCESSIBLE THAN IN MANY COUNTRIES. THIS HAS FACILITATED THE EXTENSIVE USE OF PERSONAL CONTACT BY MEMBERS OF THE MISSION WITH THOSE WHOSE OPINIONS AND EXPERTISE ARE THOUGHT TO INFLUENCE THE DECISION-MAKERS.

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THE PROBLEM FOR US HAS BEEN ONE OF IDENTIFICATION. IN NEPAL, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF POWER BELOW THE HIGHEST LEVEL. INSTITUTIONS AND POSITIONS WITHIN THOSE INSTITUTIONS ARE INFLUENTIAL ONLY INsofar AS THE PERSONALITIES INVOLVED ARE INFLUENTIAL.

2. PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY RECOGNIZE THE LIMITATIONS ON OUR

INTERESTS, NEPALIS GENUINELY WELCOME THE AMERICAN PRESENCE AS A COUNTERBALANCE TO NEPAL'S PUTATIVELY LESS DISINTERESTED NEIGHBORS, INDIA AND CHINA. NEPALI LEADERS TEND TO VIEW THE U.S. AS BENEVOLENT, GENERALLY BENIGN, AND DISTANT -- A NATION WHOSE EXPRESSED OBJECTIVES OF SUPPORTING NEPAL'S SOVEREIGNTY, PROMOTING REGIONAL COOPERATION AND STABILITY, AND AIDING THE NATION'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ARE NOT QUESTIONED. THE RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT BY USAID ADMINISTRATOR GILLIGAN, WHILE ON AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO NEPAL, THAT THE CARTER ADMINISTRATION INTENDS TO REQUEST SUBSTANTIALLY MORE DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE FOR NEPAL HAS REINFORCED THIS VIEW. WHILE THESE PERCEPTIONS ARE, ON BALANCE, FACILITATIVE OF U.S. PUBLIC DIPLOMACY EFFORTS, THEY CAN AT TIMES ACT TO IMPEDE THOROUGH UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. POSITIONS, PARTICULARLY POSITIONS ON MULTILATERAL ISSUES OF MUTUAL CONCERN. BECAUSE THE PRESENCE OF INDIA AND THE CONTROL THAT EVEN THE MORE CONCILIATORY JANATA GOVERNMENT CAN EXERCISE OVER NEPALESE AFFAIRS OVERSHADOWS ALMOST EVERY OTHER SINGLE FACTOR IN THE FORMULATION OF NEPAL'S FOREIGN POLICY DECISIONS, IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO GAIN SUFFICIENT INTEREST ON THE PART OF NEPALI LEASERS TO ADEQUATELY EXPLAIN U.S. POLICIES. AS A RESULT, UNDERSTANDING IS SOMETIMES LACKING, SOMETIMES INCOMPLETE, EVEN AT THE HIGHEST LEVELS.

3. INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. POLICIES, AND OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH DECISIONS ARE MADE AND FROM WHICH THEY EVOLVE, HAS BEEN COMPLICATED BY THE DEEP CULTURAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DIFFERENCES BETWEEN NEPAL AND THE U.S. BECAUSE NEPAL EMERGED FROM ITS SELF-IMPOSED ISOLATION LITTLE MORE THAN A QUARTER OF A CENTURY AGO, EXPOSURE OF THE NATION, ITS INSTITUTIONS, AND ITS LEASERS TO WESTERN CONCEPTS AND APPROACHES TO PROBLEMS OF MUTUAL CONCERN HAS BEEN MINIMAL, AND SOMETIMES RESENTED. IN ADDITION, ONLY A VERY SMALL INTELLECTUAL AND CULTURAL ELITE DISPLAYS ANY REAL INTEREST IN AMERICAN CULTURE OR SOCIETY; AND THIS ELITE HAS LITTLE ACCESS TO, AND GENERALLY LESS INFLUENCE OVER, THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF NEPALI LEADERSHIP. CONSEQUENTLY, IT IS SOMETIMES DIFFICULT TO EXPOSE NEPALI LEADERS WHO EXERCISE REAL INFLUENCE ON THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES TO IMPORTANT FACETS OF AMERICAN EXPERIENCE VITAL TO REAL COMPREHENSION OF U.S. POLICIES.

4. ALTHOUGH THERE ARE NOT NOW ANY ISSUES WHICH IMPEDE COMMUNICATIONS BETWEEN THE U.S. AND NEPAL, THE USG'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY CONSTITUTES THE GREATEST PRESENT AND POTENTIAL IRRITANT. MANY NEPALI LEADERS GENUINELY SEEM TO BELIEVE THAT PUBLIC U.S. EXPRESSIONS OF CONCERN OVER HUMAN RIGHTS BORDER ON INTERFERENCE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS. THERE IS ALSO RATHER WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT U.S. STATEMENTS PLAY INTO THE HANDS OF ELEMENTS IN INDIA (AND ELEMENTS WITHIN NEPAL) WHO DEMAND

POLITICAL LIBERALIZATION AND A CONSEQUENT DILUTION OF THE
AUTHORITY OF THE MONARCHY -- A DEVELOPMENT UNACCEPTABLE TO
THE REGIME. CONSEQUENTLY, THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF GENUINE AND
PURPOSEFUL MISUNDERSTANDING OF AMERICA'S HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY.

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THE NEPALI PRESS, ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS, HAS CHOSEN TO ENGAGE
IN WHAT WE JUDGE TO BE WILLFUL MISINTERPRETATIONS OF STATEMENTS
CONVERNING THE U.S. PERCEPTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN NEPAL.
CORRECTING SUCH MISINTERPRETATIONS AND PROVIDING EFFECTIVE
PUBLIC DIPLOMACY SUPPORT FOR THE MISSION'S GOAL OF ENCOURAGING
BETTER PERFORMANCE ON THE PART OF NEPAL IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS
AREA WILL BE A DELICATE UNDERTAKING.

5. NEPAL HAS TAKEN A GENERALLY MODERATE STANCE ON NORTH-SOUTH
AND EAST-WEST ISSUES COMING BEFORE MULTILATERAL FORA. IT HAS
BEEN ONE OF THE MOST GENUINELY NON-ALIGNED OF THE "NON-ALIGNED."
UNFORTUNATELY, NEPAL'S RELATIVE ISOLATION FROM THE ARENAS IN
WHICH MOST NORTH-SOUTH AND EAST-WEST ISSUES ARE DISPUTED HAS
RESULTED IN INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACTORS INVOLVED
IN MANY ISSUES. AT LEAST PARTLY AS A RESULT OF
SUCH INADEQUATE UNDERSTANDING, NEPAL AT TIMES EXHIBITS A
DESIRE NOT TO OFFEND EITHER ITS NEIGHBORS OR ITS THIRD WORLD
PEERS BY TAKING A STAND ON MATTERS NOT OF PERCEPTIBLY
DIRECT CONCERN TO NEPAL.

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6. HIS MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT HAS PLACED NO REAL OBSTACLES IN THE WAY OF OUR ATTEMPTS TO CORRECT MISUNDERSTANDINGS. DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIALS IS UNHINDERED, AND THE LOCAL PRESS WELCOMES AND MAKES FREQUENT USE OF SUCH MATERIALS. THE COUNTRY'S PRINCIPAL NEWSPAPERS, THE SEMI-OFFICIAL GORKHAPATRA (NEPALI) AND THE RISING NEPAL (ENGLISH) HAVE GIVEN BALANCED TREATMENT TO INTERNATIONAL ISSUES. THE NATIONAL NEWS AGENCY, WHICH AS THE ONLY LEGAL RECIPIENT OF FOREIGN WIRE SERVICES EXERCISES COMPLETE CENSORSHIP OVER FOREIGN NEWS AVAILABLE TO THE PUBLIC, HAS BEEN EQUALLY BALANCED IN ITS DISTRIBUTION OF MATERIAL. SOME DIFFICULTY HAS BEEN ENCOUNTERED IN GAINING COMPREHENSION OF SUCH ISSUES BECAUSE OF THE GOVERNMENT'S UNWILLINGNESS TO ENFORCE THE THIRD COUNTRY RULE WITH REGARD TO THE SOMETIMES VITUPERATIVE, USUALLY MISLEADING, INFORMATION ACTIVITIES OF COUNTRIES WHOSE POLICIES OFTEN ARE ANTITHETICAL TO THOSE OF THE U.S. FORTUNATELY, THE BLATANTLY PROPAGANDISTIC NATURE OF SUCH ACTIVITIES, AND THE HEAVY-HANDEDNESS WITH WHICH CERTAIN ISSUES ARE ADDRESSED, HAS SUBSTANTIVELY LIMITED THEIR EFFECTIVENESS.
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